



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

**A captain of the “Mexican Mafia” street gang arrested in Laredo
while smuggling 12 immigrants inside tractor-trailer**
Gang member holds the position of Captain

LAREDO, Texas — A member of the violent “Mexican Mafia” street gang was arrested here Thursday by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents while he tried to smuggle into the United States 12 aliens hidden in the back of a tractor-trailer.

Jorge Antonio Espinoza, 40, from Laredo, was in federal court this morning where he was charged with attempting to transport illegal aliens into the United States. Espinoza was denied bond and is expected to remain in federal custody pending his next hearing scheduled for Aug. 4.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspectors discovered the smuggled aliens when Espinoza tried to pass through the checkpoint located near Interstate Highway 35 near Laredo. The aliens were found hidden in the back of the tractor-trailer during the secondary inspection process.

“Individuals who seek to threaten the safety of our communities, such as members of violent street gangs, will be sought out and brought to justice,” said Alonzo Pena, special agent-in-charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in San Antonio. “Espinoza is a smuggler who has no regard for human life. He attempted to transport 12 people inside a refrigerated tractor-trailer where they could have suffered severe medical complications.”

Espinoza is one of the captains of the “Mexican Mafia” that operates in Laredo. His criminal history ranges from possessing drugs to escaping from prison.

The immigrants discovered inside the trailer were citizens of Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. All 12 remain in ICE custody pending the outcome of their immigration cases.

This arrest is the latest law enforcement action under Operation Community Shield, a nationwide ICE anti-gang initiative to disrupt, dismantle and assist in criminally prosecuting violent gangs by employing the full range of law enforcement authorities available to ICE.

Operation Community Shield was launched in February 2005 targeting MS-13 gang members, and was expanded in May 2005 to target all gangs. An ICE assessment identified that most gang members were foreign-born, in the United States illegally, had prior criminal convictions, and/or were involved in crimes that made them subject to ICE's extensive immigration and customs authorities.

ICE uses its unique immigration authorities (both criminal and administrative) to target foreign-born gang members. ICE also uses its customs authorities to target gang-related narcotics smuggling, gun smuggling, money laundering, and in seeking forfeiture of illegally derived assets.

To report suspicious activity, members of the public should call the ICE hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.